



GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA OFFICE OF POLICE COMPLAINTS

April 10, 2006

Open Letter to the Editor of the Washington Examiner:

In the interest of accurate, complete, and unbiased reporting, we are compelled to point out errors in an article in the April 3, 2006, edition of your publication. Having brought these mistakes to your attention in e-mails dated April 3 and April 5, we note that The Washington Examiner has not made any corrections.

The article at issue is entitled, "Police Review Board Accused of Racism," and it deals with unfair labor practice complaints that have been filed by the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) labor union against our agency, the Office of Police Complaints (OPC), which is governed by the Police Complaints Board (PCB). This "exclusive" piece was authored by your reporter, Bill Myers.

Because these complaints are currently under review by the D.C. Public Employee Relations Board, an administrative agency that handles labor-management disputes, our letter focuses on your reporting on the complaints because it would not be appropriate to respond at this time to the specific claims made by the FOP.

Your article stated that the FOP's unfair labor practice complaints alleged that OPC "did not hold hearings before disciplining officers." This statement is simply false because the FOP did not make any such claim in an unfair labor practice complaint. Moreover, it could not be true because OPC does not discipline officers. That responsibility lies with the Chief of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD).

Your article stated that the FOP alleged that OPC "wouldn't allow stewards to sit in on interviews with union members." This statement also is false because the FOP has made no such claim.

Your article stated that the FOP "has asked a city administrative board to bar the office from conducting any further investigations unless it abides by the union contract." Once again, this statement is false because the FOP had not asked for any such relief. A simple reading of the complaints that someone had furnished to your reporter would have revealed all three of these errors.

Finally, your article stated that "[s]o far this year, five police officers have been disciplined" by OPC. This statement also is false because, as pointed out above, OPC does not discipline officers. This error could also have been avoided if, as we suggested when your reporter called for us to comment, he had consulted the agency's most recent annual report explaining who has the authority to discipline MPD officers.

In addition to correcting these errors, it is important that we respond to certain statements included in the article.

According to the article, “the union now says the office has been targeting minority stewards who are trying to represent officers.” FOP chairman Kristopher K. Baumann is subsequently quoted in the article as saying, “The fact that there’s apparently racism involved ... is unbelievable.” These conclusory statements are made in reference to OPC having removed union representatives who were interfering with or disrupting our investigative interviews.

As an initial matter, our agency still has not seen the letter referenced in your article that forms the basis of these statements, and that was purportedly sent to the D.C. Office of Human Rights urging it to investigate whether union stewards are being singled out because of their race, a fact that was told to your reporter. Even so, your paper printed these inflammatory statements without your reporter ever detailing the content of the letter or asking for any information about the behavior of the union representatives in question, the conduct of the vast majority of subject officers and union stewards who cooperate with our investigations and do not engage in disruptive behavior, or anything else.

Our agency frequently receives complaints from citizens alleging racial discrimination or racial profiling by MPD officers. When investigating these and other complaints, we do not follow the irresponsible approach apparently used by the FOP chairman and conveyed in your paper – reaching a hasty conclusion or disseminating information while ignoring basic facts.

Instead, OPC investigates all allegations against the police in a thorough and professional manner. During this process, OPC has always taken great care to afford everyone, including officers and citizens, fair treatment when resolving citizen complaints filed with our agency, and we will continue to do so. This fair treatment includes providing due process protections to officers in a manner that is consistent with all applicable laws and the rights of organized labor. In fulfilling our agency’s mission to promote police accountability, however, OPC will not tolerate disruptive and inappropriate behavior by either officers or citizens that prevents us from getting at the truth during our investigations. The public demands no less and should be fully aware of our approach.

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Chair
Police Complaints Board

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